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ABSTRACT

Using volunteers will help school administrators maintain educational quality in the face of rising operating costs. School volunteerism has increased both in the numbers and types of people volunteering and in the range of tasks that volunteers perform. At present, 2.3 million volunteers work an average of six hours a day apiece in the schools. Drawing volunteers from business and the community helps improve schools' relationships with these external groups, for instance, by stimulating support for bond issues or school programs. The National School Volunteer Program (NSVP), which provides leadership services to volunteers, has developed three programs to help schools use volunteers. In its Kindergarten Screening Program, volunteers help screen and train children with disabilities. Its Listener Program pairs volunteers with children who have emotional or social problems. Volunteers in its Academic Skills Program tutor underachievers and help with other classroom tasks. Examples from around the country illustrate the success of these three NSVP programs. (RW)

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School Volunteer Programs: A Resource for the Schools

by

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April 5, 1981

Inflation and the reduction of community fiscal resources have threatened the quality of education in many school districts. Although school enrollments have dropped in many cases, costs have continued to rise. For example, school expenditures have climbed 95 percent over the past ten years. Although capital spending has dropped and spending for instruction has remained proportionally constant, operational costs have increased. When school budget reductions are made, programs, services, and staff are generally the first to be cut. The passage of PL 94-142, "Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975" has placed additional stress on school resources by mandating mainstreaming and Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) for handicapped children. It is essential that school administrators look for additional resources to maintain and enhance the quality of their educational programs. One solution is the use of volunteers.

To respond to these issues, Teacher Corps at Chicago State University hosted the Illinois Statewide School Volunteer Conference on

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December 12, 1970. The theme was the "Utilization of Volunteers for the Special Needs of Children". C.J. Reed, Director of Membership Services of the National School Volunteer Program, Isabel Meth, Regional Vice President of N.S.V.P. and Nancy Silvers, Director of the Illinois Governor's Office of Voluntary Citizens were the conference presenters. Lectures and slide presentations gave an overview of volunteerism, -- programs, role of teachers and volunteers, materials, and services.

Background

Volunteerism is a means of expanding America's existing resources in government, education and human services. In the past volunteers were typically parents and retirees. Recent legislation and popularization of volunteering have increased the quality and quantity of volunteer participants. U.S. Census Bureau data shows a growth in volunteers (all areas) from 21.7 million in 1965 to over 37 million in 1974 of which 59 percent were women. A recent study indicates that in education over 2.3 million volunteers are working an average of six hours per day. Most of these school volunteers are working directly with children. The diversity of volunteers has changed to include grandparents, high school and university students, retirees, and business employees loaned to schools on a regular basis. Volunteers now serve in many capacities from tutoring children, to making materials and games, supervising programs, advising board members, and others.

The National School Volunteer Program, a not-for-profit organization, provides leadership services to six million volunteers who serve regularly

in the schools. Most of the organized volunteer programs in the school districts or single schools use volunteer coordinators who work with the school administration and staff in the recruitment, orientation, screening, training, placement, supervision and evaluation of volunteers from the community. Volunteers become an integral part of the educational process when they become co-workers and effective partners with the school staff. Volunteers work at the request and under the direction of the school staff. Volunteerism can strengthen the fiscal status of the schools and positively influence the educational programs, the school's climate, school community relations, and the implementation of federal court decisions and programs.

School and Community

School volunteers, because they are residents of the local community, are in a position to communicate with other citizens and taxpayers about the schools' problems and successes. They can stimulate greater resident participation, understanding, and support for school programs. This is particularly significant for the passage of school bonds and support of controversial programs. Family life and drug education are examples of programs in which volunteers can help citizens avoid the resentment, anxiety, and frustation which might occur when federally-mandated programs and court decisions conflict with restricted school district budgets and community attitudes, as with PL 94-142, mainstreaming, pupil desegregation plans, and career education programs.

Public education and free enterprise can build mutually beneficial relationships through volunteer programs. For example, industry and business can lend its human and material resources to improve the quality of selected schools. A major benefit to business is the training of a more qualified and competent labor force. These school-business alliances, school-business partnerships or adopt-a-school programs have increased over the past decade. Exemplary programs include:

- The Sun Oil Tutorial Program provided time-released employees to tutor math and reading in the Dallas, Detroit and Philadelphia schools.
- A life insurance company released personnel to develop industry related reading and math skill programs for junior high students in the Dallas schools.
- IBM and Munsingwear in Minneapolis sponsored seminars in job seeking skills, writing, grooming and speakers for classes.

Volunteer School Programs

Each volunteer is recruited, interviewed, screened and given an orientation to meet the specific local needs of community-school programs. Volunteers will increase the teacher's time for actual teaching by reinforcing existing skills of students, helping them to improve socially and academically and to develop a sense of responsibility, independence and self worth.

The National School Volunteer Program has developed three important programs for volunteer utilization: 1) The Kindergarten Screening Program; 2) The Listener Program and 3) The Academic Skills Program:

The Screening Program involves volunteers in the gross screening of entering Kindergarten and other children to detect "high risk" children with visual, auditory, language, eye-hand coordination, and gross motor problems. Volunteers are trained to use the appropriate instruments of gross screening, but not for diagnosing. This is left to professionals. Screening information is sent to the teacher and the school nurse. Later the volunteer may provide remedial activities. For example:

- In Oakland, volunteers helped primary children to perfect motor skills by giving them an extra hour each week to work on balance beams and mats, performing programmed exercises in gymnastics;

- In Canton and Zanesville, Ohio vision volunteers recorded learning materials, transcribed books into Braille, and supplied tactile materials to train fingertips of blind students.

The Listener Program is a vehicle for volunteers to share their experience on a non-authoritive level with children who are emotionally and socially maladapted. The goal of the program is to pair a child with a warm, accepting adult (as a friend) on a one-to-one basis during school hours. This allows the child to share his conversations, problems, anxieties and joys, hopefully enhancing his achievement, self-concept and behaviors. It is similar to a "big sister/brother" program, except dependent, surrogate parent relationships are discouraged. Listener programs appear to have been successful:

- In Forth, Texas, volunters worked on a one-to-one basis with children in a Growth Center Program which helped children improve their confidence and their ability to achieve in academic tasks; similar programs conducted in Florida, Idaho and Pennsylvania have helped children with problems related to parental separation and divorce, death or serious illness in the family and the arrival of a new sibling.

The Academic Skills Program uses volunteers to give underachievers extra help, attention and drill to enhance and reinforce learning. Tutoring and small group instruction by the volunteers under the supervision of a teacher is particularly applicable to handicapped children in mainstreamed classrooms. The contributions of school volunteers are limitless. The imaginative teacher-volunteer team can create many ways to increase learning opportunities for students.

- Volunteers talk with children and listen to them, exploring their interests and supplying enrichment activities. They help the slow learner to understand abstract concepts by using manipulative materials and concrete experiences--puzzles, kits, letter tiles, Cuisenaire rods, a clock, calendars, dominoes and other sorting and learning activities and games. They help children develop critical thinking skills and do problem-solving. They help to stimulate language development by interesting children in acting out stories, giving puppet shows, and using a tape recorder to interview each other. Volunteers assist older students who have reading problems listen as they read their assignments.

Exemplary programs have been conducted across the country:

- In Miami, trained reading and math tutors worked with students in grades two to six who were one or more years below national norms; children who worked with volunteers gained significantly more in reading and math achievement than non-tutored students.

- In Los Angeles, 3,000 older school volunteers perform a variety of tasks, including tutoring in reading, math and English as-a-second-language, serving as classroom grandparents and classroom aides, helping with administrative tasks; many work with handicapped children; turnover is low.

In addition to volunteerism providing needed supplementary services to the schools and the children, there is the cost effectiveness of the program to be considered. Some volunteer programs operate with no allocated funds; others receive minimal support for a salaried coordinator from the general school fund, Title I ESEA, foundations, or the business community. In any case the per pupil costs are substantially less than that of the regular program.

In an age of declining birth rate, reduced school budgets, and increasing demands on the schools to solve complex human and social problems, volunteers, teamed with educators, can make significant contributions to the community and the school.